

CPC Minutes of September 21, 2010

A regular meeting of the City Plan Commission (CPC) was held on Tuesday, September 21, 2010 at 4:45 p.m. in the Department of the Planning and Development (DPD) 4th Floor Auditorium, 400 Westminster Street, Providence, Rhode Island.

Opening Session

Call to order: Chairman Durkee called the meeting to order at 4:46 p.m.

Members Present: Chairman Steve Durkee, Vice Chairman Harrison Bilodeau, Bryan Principe, Meredyth Church, Samuel Limiadi

Member(s) Absent: Andrew Cortes

Staff Present: Robert Azar, Bonnie Nickerson, Adrienne Southgate, Choyon Manjrekar.

Approval of meeting minutes from August 17 2010: Mr. Principe made a motion seconded by Mr. Bilodeau to approve the minutes. All voted in favor.

City Council Referral

1. Referral 3332 – Petition by the Narragansett Boat Club for an easement adjacent to 2 River Road

Mr. Azar introduced the proposal requesting an easement from the applicant's property line extending westward into River Road with the effect of it narrowing the public right of way to 18 feet, extending the curb to the west and pushing a portion of the curb at the eastern edge of River Road into Blackstone Park. The easement would provide 6,200 SF to the boat club for its operations. Mr. Azar said requests like this were generally treated as abandonments and asked the applicant to explain why an easement was being requested.

Mr. Jim Devol, representing the Narragansett Boat Club (NBC) spoke about its history and said the club needed the space requested. He said the club was restricted by the park boundary and sought the opinion of the City's Traffic Department and State Department of Transportation (DOT) to address the issue of narrowing the street and its effect on traffic calming. The club wanted to develop the easement consistent with Parks Department's goals. The land was requested as an easement because of advice from various parties and because the club was unsure of issues surrounding land ownership. Mr. Durkee asked for clarification. Mr. Devol said the existing building is waterlocked and was unsure of the consistency of the land beneath it. Requesting the easement would be easier than being granted an abandonment or transfer of property.

Mr. Azar asked if the City would hold title to the land. Mr. Devol said that was the intention. Mr. Azar asked who was expected to pay for required improvements like street relocation, paving and curbing. Mr. Devol said funds were being sought from the Parks Department's allocation for the area and the Champlin Foundation. A discussion ensued on the existing and proposed curbing. Mr. Durkee asked if the easement would result in the curved road shown on the plan. Mr. Azar said that would be the case and the road was

the proposed location for the Blackstone Bikeway. Mr. Devol said it was his understanding that it wasn't certain if the bike path would pass there. A discussion on drainage and utilities ensued. Mr. Azar asked if the applicant had considered applying for an easement at the south of the building instead of the west. Mr. Devol said it would make transporting boats, trailer parking and viewing of boating events difficult. Mr. Durkee asked if the applicant wished to build on the site. Mr. Devol said it would be a possibility. Mr. Durkee asked if it would be more beneficial for the applicant to own the land. Mr. Devol said he was advised that it would be easier to obtain an easement. Ms. Southgate said she could not comment on the guidance received by the applicant. A discussion ensued on the extent of the easement and the body that would grant it. Mr. Devol said a new sidewalk would be inserted into park land. Ms. Southgate said that the letter she read from the Parks Department stated that the applicant could use City land adjacent to the park and was unclear why the Parks Department was proposing an easement on land outside their purview. Mr. Devol said the Parks Department may have been influenced by information he had provided.

Mr. Durkee said abandonment may be the easier way to proceed. A discussion on the process of abandonment and its cost ensued. Mr. Durkee asked how the applicant could build within an easement area that belonged to the city. Ms. Southgate said a broad easement that permitted building could be granted subject to development approval from relevant bodies. Mr. Azar said the DPD's concern was that there was sufficient road width for cyclists and motorists regardless of a bike path. Mr. Devol said narrowing the street would aid traffic calming.

Mr. Limiadi asked if the issue was the City not being able to grant an easement. Ms. Southgate said there was no reason for the City not to have an easement. Mr. Azar asked if the applicant could install signs that indicated that the road would narrow. Mr. Devol said he would. Mr. Limiadi asked if pedestrian movement would be affected. Mr. Devol said that pedestrians could use the installed sidewalk. Mr. Azar said that the proposed area would result in a narrow street for trailer transportation and asked if the applicant could accept a narrower easement area. Mr. Devol said that a DOT official – Mr. Lambri Zerva – said he was comfortable with the street width and wanted the requested street width to accommodate visitors and boat transport trailers. A discussion ensued on possible development options and regulations.

Mr. Durkee asked if there would be parking in the easement area. Mr. Devol said that there would only be parking at the south of the building. Mr. Azar recommended a condition be added requiring that the easement be granted only upon the applicant bearing the cost of installing new curbing and completing all required improvements. Mr. Durkee also added a condition that the applicant install signs indicating that the street would narrow and act as a traffic calming measure.

Mr. Grant Dulgarian said traffic calming measures would be beneficial, but requested the road be narrowed to not less than 20 feet.

Mr. Limiadi made a motion seconded by Mr. Principe to recommend that CPC make a positive recommendation to grant the easement subject to fulfillment of the DPD and CPC's conditions. All voted in favor.

Providence Tomorrow

2. Downtown Plan - Presentation of revised version of the Downtown Plan by DPD staff.

Ms. Nickerson presented the revised version of the Downtown Plan first presented at the August CPC meeting. She spoke about the following plan changes:

- The section describing the study area was changed to provide a more detailed description.
- On page 11, sections about the Downtown Improvement District and Interim Uses were added to the strategy framework.
- Material on institutional challenges, tension between land uses and infrastructure challenges was added on page 14. More information has been added on wayfinding issues in Downtown.
- A new section on urban design has been added on page 16.
- On page 23, a map showing opportunities for Downtown, followed by descriptions has been added. Language about important transformative projects like the Downtown Circulator and proposed streetcar route has been added. The design competition for the Downtown Bridge received 47 entries, which will be publicly judged in November with a winner chosen in December.
- Cathedral Square and Kennedy Plaza were designated as transformative projects. The I-95 viaduct, which will be rebuilt, has the advantage of creating connections and stitching streets. Language on the impact of preservation oriented development has been added.
- The section on Actions/Goals and Policies will be updated in the next draft of the plan after comments are received. Several comments received dealt with the name for the knowledge district and its boundaries. A drawing showing the districts limits are on page 29. Ms. Nickerson read out some comments submitted by the Providence Foundation requesting more specific description of subdistricts like the Downcity arts district, Convention Center area, Financial District and Cathedral Square. The Providence Foundation went through a visioning process for Downtown and requested that a section on a vision for Downtown be included. The importance of mixed use was emphasized.

A discussion on the plan ensued.

Arthur Salisbury commented on the name of the Knowledge District and inquired about its boundaries and asked if it could change. Ms. Nickerson said that it remained to be seen if the boundaries needed adjusting.

Peter McClure said that a development vision for I-195 parcels was required to ensure desirable development. Richard Lappin commented on the Downtown boundary and development guidelines. Mr. Durkee said that the boundary issue was debatable, but the Capital Center should be included within Downtown. A more predictable environment would attract more investors.

Mr. McClure said he felt the development plan focused too closely on life sciences to spur development and said the plan should be more flexible to include other alternatives.

Ms. Nickerson said comments received will be incorporated into the next version of the plan, the goals and policies section will be updated. The final version of the plan will be presented in November with public comment being taken and incorporated till that point.

Grant Dulgarian made comments relating to streetcars, old downtown plans, the history of directions on streets and building height.

Mr. Principe made a motion to adjourn the meeting seconded by Mr. Bilodeau. All voted in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 6:15 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Choyon Manjrekar', with a stylized, cursive script.

Choyon Manjrekar,
Recording Secretary